



Gray and Gay in America

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by: Cathy Grimm, Jewish Family Service of Colorado, *OIA Newswire*

DENVER, Co. - The aging baby boomer population is taking our country by storm. In an effort to meet this growing need, businesses are scrambling to create products and tailor their marketing strategies to appeal to seniors. The impact on Social Security and Medicare has become a hot topic on the political circuit, and human service organizations are expanding their programs to serve and support the aging population. The trend is national in scope, and its impact is reaching all 50 states, including ours. In Colorado today, one in eight residents is over the age of 60, and by the year 2020, Colorado's population of those aged 60 and over will more than double!

Just as important as serving aging America is the need to serve a growing, yet often overlooked segment of the over 60 crowd – the aging GLBT community. GLBT seniors make up a significant portion of the current and future aging population. In fact, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Aging Initiative estimates that between one and three million Americans over the age of 65 are gay, lesbian or bisexual. The number and proportion of GLBT seniors is expected to increase rapidly in the coming years, reaching roughly four million people by 2030.

Care & Compassion For All Seniors

Currently, the mainstream healthcare system and federal programs designed to aid aging Americans are not well-equipped to serve the unique needs of the GLBT community. The **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** cites several studies that indicate widespread homophobia among nursing home administrators, healthcare providers and other senior care providers. As a result, gay seniors often end up in social isolation or are forced to compromise their sexual orientation or gender identity to access medical services and care.

Strong quality of life is a common desire for most retired and aging people. For the GLBT community, quality of life takes on a new meaning. It means access to culturally competent senior service providers and an accepting climate among eldercare agencies. How can the GLBT community ensure they enjoy the same level of choice, freedom and quality of life as they enter their golden years?

Where Can GLBT Seniors Turn?

Jewish Family Service of Colorado (JFS) is prepared to meet the needs of the aging GLBT community. JFS is a nonprofit and nonsectarian human services agency that serves people of all ages, faiths and incomes in the Denver area through counseling, mental health, adult care-management and in-home support.

Through its Senior Services program, JFS provides a variety of services to help older adults stay strong, well and independent, including transportation, companionship, counseling and help

transitioning from home to assisted care. Senior Services is managed by a staff of experienced care managers, who create a vibrant support team and consistent, high-quality care for seniors and their families.

Through its Hearts and Hands Homemaker program, JFS caregivers also provide friendship, homemaker and care management services to people living with HIV/AIDS in the Denver area. Homemaker services include laundry, light housekeeping, meal preparation and grocery shopping, and are provided for a sliding-scale fee.

The numbers don't lie – the aging GLBT population is a growing force, both in size and influence. Now is the time for the healthcare industry and senior care providers to modernize and expand their programs to ensure culturally competent services and an accepting climate for the gay and gray in America. It's also the time for GLBT seniors to seek out and demand senior solutions in their community that ensure good quality of life now and later in life. For more information about JFS of Colorado or its Senior Services program, contact Cathy Grimm at (303) 597-5000 Ext. 320 or e-mail cgrimm@jewishfamilyservice.org.